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TAGS: PGOV PREL SOCI KOCI KWMN JO

SUBJECT: IN PRESS ROUNDTABLE, KING ASSERTS CLEAR COMMITMENT
TO SAFEGUARDING HUMAN RIGHTS, FOCUSING ON WOMEN AND MINORS

REF: 03 AMMAN 6027

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) King Abdullah II reaffirmed his commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against women and children in a November 8 meeting with editors of local daily newspapers stating that such crimes would not be tolerated as they threaten the country's future by undermining its young people. The King stressed the need to impose maximum penalties on those convicted of abusing women or children asserting that such acts "are red lines that cannot be crossed." Human rights activists immediately praised the statements believing that they were a strong indication the King will push lawmakers to amend discriminatory laws against women and strengthen laws to protect women and children from violence.

¶2. (C) Minister of Social Development Hala Lattouf outlined to Poloff on October 21 details of women and children rights-related legislation expected to go before Parliament in the near term. Planned legislation includes amendments to the Juvenile Law to include the creation of specialized juvenile courts and increasing the criminally responsible age from 7 to 12. Discussion is also underway on how to align current child rights laws with international standards.

¶3. (C) Comment: One key amendment that could face stiff opposition in Parliament is tougher sentencing guidelines under Article 98 of the Penal Code, used by judges to hand down sentences of mere months for those convicted of honor crimes. A previous attempt to pass honor crime-related legislation was rejected by the tribally conservative Parliament which believes that community issues should be governed by tribal leaders (Ref A). The GOJ hopes to limit opposition by including the Article 98 amendment as one measure in a greater Penal Code reform package. The King's remarks, which were widely covered, were probably timed to send Parliament a clear signal that he is serious about advancing women and children's rights.

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